



Field Dodder: Identification, Impact, and Control

What is field dodder?

Field dodder is a **parasitic plant** that depends on other plants for water and nutrients. Dodder seeds can remain viable in the soil for **20 years or more**, meaning an infestation can reappear years after it seems to be gone.

Seeds generally germinate in spring. Young dodder plants attach to a suitable host using specialized structures called **haustoria**.

Once attached, the lower portion of the dodder plant dies, leaving the dodder dependent on the host plant.

How Dodder Affects Plants

Dodder draws nutrients and water from its host, weakening the plant.

Parasitism can interfere with the host plant's **nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and organic/inorganic matter balance**.

Infested plants may have reduced growth and vigor.

Heavy infestations can reduce **flower, fruit, and seed production**.

Common hosts include crops such as **alfalfa, sugar beets, tomatoes, and other herbaceous plants**.

If you are an individual with a disability who is in need of an auxiliary aid or service to participate, please contact Morgan Latimore in advance at (575) 763-6505 or latimor5@nmsu.edu.



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Best Approach: Integrated Control

Successful dodder management requires **multiple control methods rather than relying on one treatment:**

Prevention

Use clean, high-quality seed.

Keep field edges, irrigation canals, and nearby areas free of dodder.

Remove and destroy dodder-infested weeds before they produce seed.

Use clean, well-rotted manure.

Monitor susceptible crops regularly—about every **15 days**—to catch infestations early.

Practice long-term crop rotation.

If dodder seed is present in the soil, avoid planting susceptible host crops in that area for approximately **4–5 years** when practical.

Mechanical Control

Hand-pull or remove small infestations.

Prune infected branches from woody ornamentals.

Cut or mow dodder before it produces seed.

Remove infected plant material carefully because mature dodder can remain viable after removal.

Larger infestations may require repeated tillage or other physical control methods.

Herbicide Control

Herbicides are generally most effective **before dodder attaches to the host plant**.

Preventative herbicides can reduce the chance of seedlings becoming established.

Research in alfalfa found glyphosate treatments provided the highest control in the study, followed by propyzamide and imazetapyr treatments.

Important: Herbicide choice depends heavily on the crop, site, application timing, and product label.

Non-selective herbicides such as glyphosate can also injure or kill desirable plants.

What About Lawns?

Glyphosate can control dodder, but it is **not selective** and can damage desirable turfgrass.

Cool-season grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass may be particularly sensitive, while warm-season grasses such as bermudagrass and zoysiagrass can respond differently.

Application timing, temperature, wind, and other weather conditions affect herbicide performance and the risk of drift or injury.

For lawns, **physical removal and preventing dodder from producing seed may be preferable to broad herbicide application**, depending on the infestation.

Key Takeaway

The best way to manage field dodder is to prevent it from producing seed and spreading. Early detection, removal before seed production, sanitation, crop rotation, and appropriate herbicide use can work together to reduce infestations. Because dodder seeds can remain viable for decades, **long-term management is more effective than treating the infestation only after it becomes established.**

Extension message: *Catch it early, remove it before it seeds, and prevent contaminated plant material or seed from spreading.*



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- https://www.pddc.wisc.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/39/files/Fact_Sheets/FC_PDF/Dodder.pdf
- <https://aspace.agrif.bg.ac.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/3903/3900.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- <https://fiver.ifvcns.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/1475/1472.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- <https://homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu/2025/09/01/dodder/>
- <https://gardenerbible.com/will-glyphosate-kill-my-lawn/>